

ISAS Special Report

No. 06 – 3 July 2012

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China-India Media Mediation

ISAS hosts 'China-India Media Mediation' Workshop

The India-China relationship is one of the most significant bilateral relationships of the 21st century. While the economic and strategic aspects of this equation have long been debated, the role of the media on both sides is much less understood. Together, the two countries constitute the world's largest media market and the day-to-day concerns of media on both sides can have serious consequences for the future of international relations and for daily diplomacy and national perceptions in China and India.

To better understand the evolving role of the media in the India-China relationship, ISAS organised the 'China-India Media Mediation' workshop on 17 and 18 May 2012. It brought together senior representatives from the Chinese and Indian media and senior academics from Singapore, Australia, United States, Canada, China and India.

Proceedings of ISAS Workshop held in Singapore on 17 and 18 May 2012:

The deepening linkages among countries in different parts of Asia are shaping the regional architecture of the Asia-Pacific from an economic and strategic perspective. These relations are re-defining not only Asia but the entire world. One of the key equations in this regard is the China-India relationship.

China's and India's rapid economic growth and strategic progress have given them a large presence in the Asian and global landscapes. Both countries have been successful in re-charting global discourse and debates, prompting many thought leaders to declare the current century an 'Asian century'.

We at ISAS consider this as one of the most significant bilateral relationships of modern times. We believe a strong and constructive partnership between the two countries is essential for stable and prosperous growth of Asia and the rest of the world. Indeed, our research agenda, over time, has included several themes and projects pertaining to different aspects of the China-India relationship.

In today's world, the media – print, audio-visual, or digital – plays a fundamental role in influencing national and individual perceptions. Reports, analyses and observations by the media are accessed by agencies and individuals who gather information and intelligence about other countries and peoples.

We have no doubt that the Chinese and Indian media are playing very significant roles in this respect. There is a view that the Chinese and Indian media have occasionally been unduly harsh in their reportage of developments in India and China respectively. While this could well be a general impression not necessarily backed by conclusive evidence, we do feel that greater interaction between media representatives from both sides, unbiased knowledge about each other's ways of working and approaches to reporting on different developments – pertaining to business, politics and other issues – will contribute significantly to genuine understanding between media in both countries and help in building a stronger relationship between China and India.

In order to achieve the above objectives, ISAS organised a conference on 'China-India Media Mediation' in Singapore on 17 and 18 May 2012, bringing together representatives from the Chinese and Indian media and senior academics from Singapore, Australia, US, Canada, China and India. The aims of the workshop were:

- a) To provide a non-partisan forum for Chinese and Indian media representatives to meet and interact with each other;
- b) Share views and perceptions on the China-India relationship;
- c) Illustrate how respective media agencies and organisations work in the two countries; and
- d) How the media from both sides can contribute to better understanding and stronger ties between the two countries.

This special report summarises the proceedings of this workshop. The report has been prepared by Dr Amitendu Palit, Professor Robin Jeffrey, Dr Nalin Mehta, Mr P S Suryanarayana and Ms Pratima Singh from ISAS. The team gratefully acknowledges the meticulous rapporteur support of Ms Mamta Sachan Kumar, Mr Laldinkima Sailo, Mr Ishraq Ahmed and Mr Rodney Sebastian.

Speakers and Moderators

Professor **Prasenjit Duara**, Director, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore.

Professor **Yuezhi Zhao**, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University,

Dr **Richard Rigby**, Executive Director ANU China Institute, Australian National University

Professor **Shen Dingli**, Executive Dean, School of International Affairs, Fudan University

Professor **Govind Hariharan**, Executive Director, India China America (ICA) Institute

Dr **S Narayan**, Head of Research and Visiting Senior Research Fellow, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore

Professor **Robin Jeffrey**, Visiting Research Professor, Institute of South Asian Studies and Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore.

Dr **Amitendu Palit**, Head (Partnership & Programme) & Visiting Senior Research Fellow, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore

Dr **Nalin Mehta**, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, Institute of South Asian Studies and Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

Mr **P S Suryanarayana**, Editor (Current Affairs), Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore

Dr **Ronojoy Sen**, Visiting Research Fellow, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore

Mr **Simon Long**, Columnist, The Economist

Ms **Tang Lu**, Senior Editor, Xinhua News Agency

Ms **Meng Na**, Director of Political, Cultural Desk, Department of China News for World Service, Xinhua News Agency

Mr **Srinjoy Chowdhury**, National Affairs Editor, Times Now

Professor **Zhou Rong**, Chief of South Asia Bureau, Guangming Daily

Mr **Ananth Krishnan**, China Correspondent, The Hindu

Mr **Subhomoy Bhattacharjee**, Executive Editor – News, Financial Express

Mr **Anshuman Tiwari**, Chief of National Bureau, Dainik Jagran

Ms **Huo Kan**, Senior Reporter, Caixin Media

Dr **Li Yang**, Journalist of Opinion Department, China Daily

Ms **Tan Furong**, Journalist and Editor, Global Times

Dr **Weiyu Zhang**, Department of Communications and New Media, National University of Singapore

Mr **Ashish Kapahi**, Visiting Researcher, Universiti Sains Malaysia

Mr **Danny Geevarghese**, News Editor, China Central Television (CCTV) (participated via Skype)

Session 1: The Big Picture

Moderator: Professor Prasenjit Duara;

Panellists: Professor Yuezhi Zhao, Professor Robin Jeffrey, Dr Nalin Mehta

Summary of Presentations:

The session provided a historical overview of the Chinese and Indian media. Professor Prasenjit Duara highlighted in his opening remarks that China-India dialogues are no longer a cottage industry, having become a heavy industry, and Singapore is a key contributor to the exchanges about the media of China and India.

The first panellist was Professor Yuezhi Zhao of Simon Fraser University's School of Communication. She mapped China's media ecology to showcase its dynamism and growing diversity, and focused on the notion of who/what today constitutes the "mainstream". Five key dimensions were identified: the structural, historical, geo-political, ideological and technological. She described Chinese media as party-controlled and state-regulated, with market-oriented administrative monopolies and hardly any cross-media ownership. They are conglomerates with differentially mandated pre- and post-reform outlets and with varied reach on a local, national or global scale.

Professor Yuezhi Zhao pointed out that the Chinese media reflect significant ideological divides. There is also differentiated control by state and private capital in the 'old' versus 'new' media spectrum. Four tiers of media were identified: key national media groups, provincial level media, municipal media and new media - with the internet via sites like *sina* being the most dynamic. The Chinese press was described as still containing a unique pre-reform feature for its categorisation based on social groups like the 'Liberation Army Daily' and 'China Women's News'. Professor Yuezhi Zhao cited Guangdong's Nanfang Daily Media Group and its influential media and internet outlets (known in some circles as the "Nanfang System") as a powerful liberal counter-balance against the 'old mainstream'. She also mentioned the role of *Utopia*, a recently suspended website, and the potential power of sites like Anti-CNN.com (now April Media), initially set up by internet-savvy youth in response to perceived Western media bias in their coverage of China.

Professor Robin Jeffrey followed with an overview of India's print media. He highlighted their diversity and huge daily street circulation of around 100 million copies. He suggested that India's diversity of languages is the key to explaining the large circulation as well as the diversity in ownership, which he traced mainly to family enterprises. He stated that the growth of newspapers in India is a relatively recent event and as literacy grows, a potential 200 million increase in readership can be forecasted in the next 10 to 15 years. A pertinent issue raised was, how does the government monitor such great diversity?

Professor Robin Jeffrey cited the Audit Bureau of Circulations and the Indian Readership Survey as being more influential for media decision-making than the data emanating from government bodies like the Registrar of Newspapers for India. He referred to the consolidation of Indian print media via shrinkage in titles and ownership, as well as the rising interest in cross-media stakes amongst proprietors. Finally, he spoke about corporatisation of the media through a growing involvement in the stock exchange due to the need for more capital. Professor Robin Jeffrey concluded by saying that Indian print media is immensely dynamic, little regulated, under various kinds of pressure and continuing to expand.

Dr Nalin Mehta gave an overview of the news television scene in India. He stated that televised media were monopolised by the state until very recently. In the first three decades after independence, television was deemed a luxury. He pointed out that television's reach was extended beyond Delhi to other metropolitan cities only in the mid-1970s, a national audience was created in the 1980s and a drastic jump in television access in India occurred only from the 1990s when it coincided with the collapse of state monopoly and the introduction of private television networks, economic reforms and cable and satellite options. Latest statistics reveal the existence of 821 officially licensed private satellite TV channels in India, excluding 30-odd state channels. Half of these channels are classified as news channels, of which over 120 are 24-hour news channels.

Dr Nalin Mehta saw the dramatic growth in TV channels as having occurred in the past decade. Regional diversity is a key feature of this expansion with at least four 24-hour news channels in each of the major regional languages (states like Andhra Pradesh, for example, have 14), many of which are affiliated to political parties. He described India as having the third largest TV market and as being the most unregulated, with only two important broadcasting-related legislations being passed since the mid-1990s: one that ensured the telecast of all international cricket matches in India on the state-owned TV network and most recently one that facilitated digitization to increase subscription revenues. Dr Nalin Mehta flagged two concerns: the large imbalance in revenue generation, where 70 per cent comes from advertisements and only 30 per cent from subscription; and the implications on coverage, in the absence of laws on cross-media ownership, especially in light of the industry consolidating rapidly.

Summary of Follow-On Discussions:

The discussions began with how recent changes in the media industry may have enhanced the scope and substance of political nationalism, which in turn affect China-India media reportage. A participant from India pointed out that there is no conscious reflection of being a nationalist when the editor decides which stories to print or air; everyone, including the Indian President and Prime Minister, are fair game for news coverage.

In response to whether the media can guide political authorities in thought processes, Professor Yuezhi Zhao said that the liberal orientation, as represented by the “Nanfang System” in China, does have relevance to the ruling party’s political structure, but at times the party’s permissible ideological boundaries are transgressed. She emphasised the significance of grassroots initiatives, like Anti-CNN.com, which do push the political authorities. She said that it is important for the authorities to respect feelings that are genuinely popular, as the youth are not simply duped by party political propaganda.

Another point raised was about the number of staffers positioned outside India and how this affects the quality of coverage of China and India. Another participant, citing experience on ground, asserted that most Indian journalists in Pakistan present a much more objective coverage of developments in the country than those based in India.

It was also mentioned that India and China are countries with a lot of news-worthy developments taking place domestically for resources to be deployed adequately for detailed coverage of external affairs. Further, it was often considered unnecessary to have journalists positioned outside (India, for instance,) when news is now easily accessible via the internet and other secondary sources.

In response to a question, no call was made on the possible future direction of the pivotal ‘Liberation Army Daily’ in China.

On the minority-language media in China, Professor Yuezhi Zhao said that there are indeed active media in the local languages in minority-area markets, but in the mainstream Han Chinese market, the state has strongly clamped down on dialect broadcast out of fear of fragmentation.

Session 2: Foreign Policy

Moderator: Mr Simon Long

Panellists: Ms Meng Na, Mr Srinjoy Chowdhury, Professor Zhou Rong

Summary of Presentations:

The session, moderated by Mr Simon Long, focused on Chinese and Indian media’s respective coverage of the other country.

Ms Meng Na provided an overview of the Chinese media's coverage of the foreign policy issues with focus on India. The overall Chinese coverage of foreign policy was viewed under four major themes. The first topic was described as "Leader Diplomacy", where the dialogues between Chinese leaders and foreign leaders visiting China are covered. The state news agency, Xinhua, covers bilateral issues in this respect and also provides news analysis and commentaries on notable state visits. Ms Meng Na highlighted the news strand of "Leader Diplomacy" as that "expounding" China's foreign policy in relation to the rest of the world. "Summit Diplomacy" is another strand of news coverage, where the media focuses on major multilateral and bilateral summits. Teams are assigned to cover multilateral summits, such as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) summit meeting which was held in New Delhi earlier this year. The third aspect was "Public Diplomacy" where some foreign policy developments are broadcast to the public. Senior government officials write articles or commentaries for newspapers. She highlighted that China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs uses the Chinese micro-blogging site similar to Twitter, called *Weibo*, to interact with the public. Finally, under the theme "Policy Explanation", the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) holds press conferences five times a week to promote a specific stand on various issues. Syria, Iran and the Huangyan Island were cited as examples. The MOFA statements were described as the propagation of the official line on foreign policy.

Ms Meng Na stated that the objectives of the mainstream media were to promote "peaceful development and build a harmonious world" through Chinese foreign policy. To this end, she pointed out that foreign policy coverage has intensified over the last few years. More commentaries are being written on aspects of foreign policy to better influence the new-media world. With respect to India also, reporting has gone up. Analyses on India usually include issues such as politics, economics, military and diplomacy. Reporting on Indian festivals and ordinary day-to-day developments has also witnessed an increase. Ms Meng Na indicated that there is an increasing willingness to report more on India. Mutual trust should also be fostered between the two countries, and to that end, she emphasised that more Indian reporters should come over to report on Chinese issues as well. She suggested that there should be more coverage on ordinary people's lives in India.

Mr Srinjoy Chowdhury started off by pointing to the ambivalent attitude of the Indian government towards China – by recounting India's former Defence Minister George Fernandes's statements on China back in 1997. He asserted that under the current circumstances of China's rapid rise, the Indian government is rather nervous. He pointed out that the television channel he works for, 'Times Now' is perceived to be anti-government. As such, 'Times Now' has run into problems with the current government in India. However, he explained, the channel simply reports news stories as they are, day after day. With respect to China, Mr Srinjoy Chowdhury stated that 'Times Now' acknowledges the friction between India and China and reports it as such, despite the government trying to play it down. He

pointed to issues that contribute to such tensions – Tibet, China-Pakistan relations and more recently the South China Sea incidents.

Mr Srinjoy Chowdhury added that possessing facts and information leads to professional reporting. The information revolution has also changed China in this regard. Previously, the Indian media had to rely on Reuters or AP or any other Western media outlet for news on China. As such, the story reflected what the Western media outlet considered important and what is very important for a Western outlet may not be as important for India or vice-versa. This has changed now – the internet allows Indian desks to read the entire story and decide on what the news-point is without depending on a third party. He acknowledged the advantages of having a reporter based in another country, but pointed out that his/her presence would be of less value in any country where virtually no access to officials is granted. He also mentioned that it is easy enough to fly in a reporter whenever necessary. Journalists are expected to be objective in any case, whether they are reporting from their country or abroad. He drew attention to the problems of getting to China and Pakistan to report – by citing the issue of obtaining a journalist visa.

Professor Zhou Rong suggested that while India and China are extending diplomacy towards each other and also engaging in mutual cooperation, suspicions still linger among them. Therefore, there needs to be well-structured media cooperation between the two countries. He pointed out that ‘Global Times’ is an urban news agency, and as a mainstream newspaper, they report nothing negative on India. He endorsed Ms Meng Na’s views that the Chinese media view on India is objective and suggested that the coverage can also be termed pro-Indian. Furthermore, the Chinese government stresses equality between India and China, even though there are significant economic differences between them. Professor Zhou Rong suggested that the emphasis on negative topics and views will leave no room for “good sentiments” to flourish between India and China and referred to Pakistan in this context. Professor Zhou Rong suggested greater media collaboration between the two countries. First, correspondents in each country need to enlarge the “positive coverage” of each other’s progress. Second, the economic and cultural achievements of each country should be highlighted along with the historic ties. Third, media people should be assigned to cover specific areas such as the fields of technology, agriculture and science, thereby enabling the people of India and China to learn about each other’s achievements. Fourth, high-calibre journalists should be exposed to each other’s culture, arts, etc. And finally, a media friendship association for the development of relations between the media personnel should be set up.

Summary of Follow-On Discussions:

The discussions covered a wide-range of issues. There were queries on the presence of Chinese media in India and whether these journalists are trained in Hindi or any other

regional languages for better coverage. Ms Meng Na mentioned that Xinhua has been increasing its staff over time. The news agencies employ local Indian staff to widen their coverage further. Local staff is being employed to cover news on ordinary citizens. Responding to a query on how Chinese media deals with “fragmented and irrational” news sources, Ms Meng Na mentioned that the practice is to evaluate each news source for checking which one is the ministry viewpoint and which one is an independent view. The official position on news is stated in Xinhua objectively. Professor Zhou Rong emphasised that important issues are responded to quickly by staff who have strong capabilities on those issues. In this regard, Mr Srinjoy Chowdhury mentioned that Indian media take reports carried out by Xinhua and Global Times seriously while tending to ignore those reported in blogs.

Responding to a query on what the ‘pro-Indian’ view on the China-India border dispute is, Professor Zhou Rong pointed out that neither Chinese nor Indian media would like to report news that will provoke domestic sentiments and antagonise citizens.

Commenting on the coverage of foreign policy issues, Mr Srinjoy Chowdhury pointed out that for the Indian media domestic issues always get priority in reporting. Clarifying that the Chinese official perspective on the Line of Actual Control is captured by the Indian media, he mentioned that Chinese media criticisms on India are welcome and it is important for the truth to be reported. Commenting on the lack of diversity in views and analytical content in talk shows on Indian television channels, Mr Srinjoy Chowdhury stressed that two different views are always highlighted while analyzing the news.

Summing up the discussions, Mr Simon Long suggested that one of the important takeaways was that presence of foreign correspondents is important for obtaining an objective assessment of issues. He also pointed out that while the Chinese media appeared to be operating in a normative sense while being responsive to public perception, the Indian media were motivated by the desire to seek the ‘truth’ underlying an issue.

Session 3: Business Reporting

Moderator: Dr S Narayan

Panellists: Mr Subhomoy Bhattacharjee, Ms Huo Kan

Summary of Presentations:

Mr Subhomoy Bhattacharjee began by providing a brief background of business reporting in India. He highlighted that India’s inward-looking autarkic economic strategies till the early-1990s influenced business reporting in India, with the business media focusing on domestic

macroeconomic issues, particularly the relation between industry and government. The focus of reporting and news coverage changed from the early-1990s as India liberalised and introduced economic reforms. He mentioned the foreign investor participation in one of India's financial dailies – *Business Standard* – as a major landmark in the history of India's business journalism. Arguing that India's business reporting began taking serious note of Asia, in particular China, since the East Asian crisis of 1997, he pointed out that Indian business media's interest in China further deepened after India's adoption of the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) policy early last decade. The interest became more exhaustive with greater penetration of Chinese products in India's domestic market and the increasing globalisation of some of India's major corporate houses. Mr Subhomoy Bhattacharjee differentiated several strands of the prevailing sentiments that characterise news reports on China over these various issues. While the interest spawning from SEZs resulted in the media writing a lot on China's economic miracle and industrial policies, coverage on penetration of Chinese goods in India saw reports becoming increasingly defensive. In more recent times, reports have highlighted the competitive angle particularly while covering the race for energy and minerals in third country markets.

Contending that the nature of media coverage has been largely episodic and superficial, Mr Subhomoy Bhattacharjee emphasised the contrasting quality gaps in India's business media in their reporting on domestic and foreign issues. While for the former, media have become highly skilled particularly in covering investigative financial market subjects, their reporting on international events continues to remain heavily dependent on feedback from government. He cited the absence of international bureaus as major lacunae in this respect. Indicating that the domestic reader's high interest in China induces the reporting of sensational news – flowing from wire agencies and also flavoured by government views – he mentioned the lack of domestic scholars on China as a major gap in doing objective reporting on China. He felt that India's news rooms can be spurred into more constructive and structured reporting on China if some 'big ticket' collaborations take place between Chinese and Indian businesses. Also, he suggested that organisations like ISAS, which have garnered considerable reputation for objectivity, can come out with assessments on issues affecting both India and China, which can be suitably used by Indian business media.

Ms Huo Kan began her presentation by indicating that economic and financial news has become a priority for all media in China including conventional newspapers, television channels as well as major news portals (e.g. *sina* and *sohu*). In her coverage of the independent business media, she mentioned key newspapers such as *21st Century Business Herald*, the *Economic Observer*, *China Business News*, and the latest business media entity *Caixin Media*, which has been in existence since 2009. Ms Huo Kan mentioned that government's recognition of transparency, efforts of journalistic elites and entrepreneurs, and the rapid growth of the Chinese economy along with extensive spread of internet services,

have resulted in the growth of an independent business media. The latter not only report facts and information, but also advocate economic reforms and acts as a watchdog for the market.

However, such journalists face several challenges. These include pressure and interference from government, limited access to information, reluctance of officials to talk to media, locating accurate information, high popularity of sensational news, increasing tendency to sacrifice professional integrity due to rising commercial pressure, efforts by companies to induce favourable reports by paying gifts (including cash) to the press, and also the tendency of using draft negative news reports to blackmail companies. Ms Huo Kan mentioned that the media continue to suffer from operating inefficiencies created by a difficult entry licensing regime. She, however, underlined her hope for an optimistic future, given the recognition being granted to transparency, professional integrity, business ethics and the government's acceptance of the media's right to investigate. The optimism is reinforced by the gradual expansion of business press and the increasing share of advertising revenue accruing to the independent press.

She underlined *Caixin's* emphasis on credible and quality journalism and indicated that once readers get used to this brand of quality journalism, they will demand the same from others, leading to an all-round improvement of quality. She highlighted *Caixin's* policy of strict instructions to its staff to refuse cash and other gifts, and the organisation's penchant for doing investigative stories on a variety of subjects including local government debt, railway investment and corruption, China's investment in Africa, pollution and environment. She made particular mention of the report on the missing children from Shaoyang city.

Summary of Follow-On Discussions:

The discussions focused on the pattern of reporting of business news involving China and India. It was pointed out that business reports on India are relatively less in the Chinese media, which was arguably due to business developments in India not yet being that important, or that much of interest to the Chinese audiences. It was also pointed out that in India, the circulation of business papers depended to a large extent on developments in national stock markets. In this respect, for Indian newspapers, developments in the US and Europe were more important to be covered since the Indian capital market, till now, had very limited integration with the Chinese market. It was, however, noted that the flavour of India's business reporting on China at times tended to be unusually protective, which, as Mr Subhomoy Bhattacharjee clarified was largely on account of reliance on wire agency reports and government accounts and the lack of objective scholarship at home.

Session 4: The Newsroom/Editorial Policy

Moderator: Dr Nalin Mehta

Panellists: Mr Danny Geevarghese (Via Skype), Dr Li Yang, Dr Ronojoy Sen, Ms Tan Furong

Summary of Presentations:

The session began with Mr Danny Geevarghese tracing the modalities of the CCTV's foreign-language network and its policy nuances. CCTV maintains eight foreign-language channels and posts correspondents in all major capitals of the world and uplinks news programmes from Asia, North America and Africa. Economic stories are not a top priority, and most stories result from reports carried by mainstream wire services. The exceptions are stories that impinge on China's territorial integrity. For sensitive stories, the direction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is followed, and, if that is absent, the line adopted by the Xinhua news agency is taken as a guide. Once stories or issues are deemed important, excellent resources are made available for coverage. India is low on the CCTV list of priorities, finding a place after the US, Europe and the Arab world but ahead of Africa. The understanding of India is limited, and many colleagues are surprised to learn of India's multiplicity of languages and of the constitutional inability of the Indian government to override the state authorities.

Dr Li Yang outlined the historical connections between India and China, but noted that tourist travel today is relatively small. He emphasised the common interests of India and China, making out a case for the Chinese and Indian media to promote mutual understanding. He also felt that stories, which are not based on identified, official sources, create misunderstandings, particularly when such stories now spread quickly on the internet. He pointed to the recent reporting of the test-launch of India's long-range ballistic missile, Agni-V, which the Western media construed as being intended as a deterrent directed at China. Neither India nor China, he said, portrayed the launch in this way. He reiterated that it was important to understand that China was a plural society and its media reflect this plurality. The Chinese media also need to understand that all of India does not speak with the same voice. India, he said, is not a high priority in editorial discussions at the *China Daily*. The most recent example of some significant coverage of India was the BRICS summit in New Delhi in March 2012.

Dr Ronojoy Sen discussed the size and scope of the family-owned company BCCL which publishes the *Times of India* (circulation 3.7 million) and owns a television channel and radio stations. It also publishes the *Economic Times*, the largest business daily, and dailies in Hindi, Marathi and Kannada languages. He displayed scanned images of some recent front pages of major Indian dailies, including those in Hindi and Bengali. He illustrated the coverage of the Agni-V missile launch, alluded to by Dr Li Yang. Dr Ronojoy Sen said that the Indian

newspaper coverage of the Agni-V was relatively muted. He said that the *Times of India* has no predetermined policy about stories relating to China. He explained the ‘busy’ look of the *Times of India* – lots of stories on a single page – as stemming from a belief that Indian readers like to see many items from which to pick and choose. The *Times of India* carries a daily religious feature on its editorial page, and this is thought to be popular with the readers. He also commented that television stories play a part in influencing the decisions about the next day’s newspaper content.

Ms Tan Furong said she detects substantial distrust between people in China and India. There is a perception in China that India is unreliable, dirty, dangerous, poor and hostile to China. People do not know that India is a fast-emerging economy with immense human talent. She felt that, on the Indian side, people regard China as a highly centralised, old Soviet-style, state. These misperceptions, she felt, result from insufficient understanding among the media professionals. Only a handful of Chinese media representatives have visited India, and the four Indian media personnel currently based in China do not constitute a sufficient number. The result is inadequate communication. The views of each other are often based on Western media presentations and not on the experiences of Chinese or Indian nationals. Problems between China and India can be solved, but they require enhanced communication. To promote this process, Ms Tan Furong invited the participants to visit the *Global Times*.

Summary of Follow-On Discussions:

The discussion focused largely on the Chinese media. India, it was said, has very few informed commentators on China and China-India relations. This accounts for the fact that the same Indian commentators are seen frequently on CCTV. Self-censorship – knowledge of what a media outlet is prepared to publish – was discussed. It was said that once a topic is identified for reporting for a publication such as the *China Daily*, the reporter has the scope to shape the story. This is particularly true with social and environmental stories. Official sources are relied on, and jumping the gun with speculative stories is not encouraged. For the *Global Times*, it was said, news relating to the US is a high priority. News from China’s neighbouring countries ranks next.

Some discussion centred on the role of media in some key areas. Should the media pursue an ideal of ‘truth’ or do they shoulder a responsibility to give the readers/viewers just information and seek to promote harmony and national progress? And how should the media deal with sources that might not tell the ‘truth’? It was suggested that a journalist may tend to express his/her opinions in trying to explain ‘why’ something has happened. It is sufficient, it was argued, to recount what has happened. This perspective, however, was at odds with the views of some non-Chinese participants who felt that official sources might sometimes be not at all candid and truthful in their accounts and that a journalist’s task is to probe the official explanations and justifications.

Session 5: New/ Social media

Moderator: Professor Robin Jeffrey

Panellists: Dr. Weiyu Zhang, Mr Ashish Kapahi

Summary of Presentations:

Dr. Weiyu Zhang prefaced the discussion on social media by arguing that technology is neither good nor bad nor indeed neutral. Each technology has its own logic which determines its impact. Addressing why social media is ‘social’, she mentioned that social media is intrinsic to Web 2.0, which, by its very nature, is much more interactive and collaborative. Web 2.0 technology allows readers to interact with the content and with other users. This is a major change from Web 1.0 which was about passive users.

Using Cr-Nielsen data, Dr Weiyu Zhang broadly divided the social media activity in China into four main types: discussion forums, bullet board system (BBS), micro blogs and blogs. Social media, she argued, is the most socially and politically influential platform in China. Tracing the evolution of BBS, she emphasised that this began with a culture of users using pseudonyms to build an online identity. Driven by a culture of online fame, this is an ecosystem where success depends on what a user does in the online sphere; offline life has no relevance and it does not matter who you are.

With respect to blogs, Dr Weiyu Zhang recalled that there was once a utopian view that blogs can usher in a whole host of new freedoms and equality. But the reality has been more complicated. Seeing the immense popularity of blogs and micro blogs, the big internet companies have joined the game. She gave the example of the actress Xu Jinglei, the most popular blogger in China, to illustrate how offline and online lives are now merging. The way the big companies promote their blogs is very commercial; they recruit celebrities and they spend money to promote them. People increasingly put their own names to their social media work, which is different from the earlier trend of using online pseudonyms.

Dr Weiyu Zhang argued that the hottest current trend in Chinese social media is Weibo which is very different from Twitter: it is a combination of micro blogs and Twitter and an integrated social platform. It allows users to connect to friends but equally with strangers (which is consistent with the trends in the BBS era). To illustrate recent trends, she provided the example of actress Yao Chen, also known as the Queen of Weibo, for her huge social media following, which has turned her into a major opinion leader. Recently she attracted a lot of criticism for re-tweeting a Weibo update that turned out to be a false rumour. It raised questions about the credibility of opinion leaders in social media. The medium is disruptive in that it breaks down older certainties. The users themselves are now journalists, editors and publishers and they have to be responsible for the content they create as it reflects on their credibility.

Referring to verification of information on online media platforms, Dr Weiyu Zhang pointed to the presence of a verification system. At first, it used to be voluntary, but after the recent controversy over spreading rumours it has become a question of replicating offline identities in the online sphere. The current debate around credibility raises a number of questions about social media: do pseudonyms really matter? How do you spot the rumour spreaders? And do real people with real names really tell the truth? Dr Weiyu Zhang concluded by suggesting that what is clear is that the rise of social media becomes threatening to those elites who cannot replicate their privileged status onto the online sphere: users, the gatekeepers of the old information order (such as journalists) and other offline elites.

Mr Ashish Kapahi argued that a cross-pollination of ideas is happening between India and China as far as the internet is concerned. Web publishing is the fastest growing business in China and the government generally takes a liberal view on many aspects of this; on the other hand, an Indian minister recently argued that online content must be screened. The responses of governments sometimes reflect the opposite of their dominant images. He focused on the structural controls and limits of the internet by mentioning that it has 4.3 billion IP addresses, of which 2.3 billion are actually used by users. This, he argued, is not enough, given the demand and a regional imbalance. Asia has only three billion IP addresses allocated to it, while its requirement is five billion. India, for example, has only 30 million. The Internet Protocol Version 4 (IP4) has expired and is to be replaced with the Internet Protocol Version 6 (IP6).

In terms of internet usage, Asia has 1.1 billion users. India and China constitute the top online users. Yet, there are vital differences between trends in the two countries. Indians are the second largest users of Facebook but China is missing from the list of top Facebook-using countries. China is also missing from the ranking of top YouTube-user countries, though it is among the top users of Google. This contrasts, for example, with Malaysia and Egypt, which are very big users of YouTube.

Mr Ashish Kapahi drew attention to the concepts of peer-production and peer-pressure which are driving large parts of the internet. For example, 60 hours of video are loaded on YouTube every minute. This raises problems for censorship, which was easier on traditional channels but is far more difficult on online media. Even if it were possible, it would require such large amounts of resources that it makes peer-production and peer-pressure virtually impossible to regulate. He argued that while it is commonplace to equate social media with open source politics, it is a myth that entry barriers to the internet have been removed. All top level domain names are controlled by the US government as are IP addresses and routing. Social media create their own elites and the people who are successful at them are usually experts. Social media do make governments nervous because content on the internet breaks through barriers that can be imposed on traditional media like books. Alluding to government attempts at clamping down on social media, he argued that the recent Indian IT Act 2008 has

serious implications because it created a new category called ‘intermediary’ which means that all social media websites are intermediaries and responsible for content.

Summary of Follow-On Discussions:

The discussions largely focused on the Chinese social media and forms of censorship. It was also pointed out that many people do not follow traditional media anymore because they have lost credibility. The discussion also touched upon the prevention of ‘hacking’ by national governments. - It was pointed out that China might be better organised in this respect, because in India multiple government bodies are all vying for the same objective with no single entity in charge. It was also pointed out that not much should be read into the provisions of the Indian IT Act 2008 since India is spending very little on the infrastructure needed to implement its provisions. Its more draconian provisions are a way of creating ‘some cosy literature’ but not necessarily easy for governments to impose. On censorship in China, it was pointed out that whatever efforts are expended by governments, there will always be a leakage and it is not technically possible to close down access even if all internet routers are shut. China does have a great wall but it can be climbed. The only workable regulation on the internet is self-regulation. Some discussion also touched upon the fact that it is important to be careful about equating the internet with absolute freedoms and it is also important to be mindful of the priorities of internet companies themselves.

Session 6: Perceptions

Moderator: Professor Richard Rigby

Panellists: Mr Anshuman Tiwari, Ms Tang Lu, Mr Ananth Krishnan

Summary of Presentations:

Mr. Anshuman Tiwari began by presenting a snap-shot, as it were, of the current Indian media scene and by describing it as free, privately owned, vibrant, and present in multiple languages, and in various forms such as print, broadcast, digital, and social. He also noted that competitive journalism is a major feature of India media as are international input and output, educated and opinionated audiences and substantial amounts of foreign equity in media houses. He then went on to discuss the frequency and genre of various India-China news coverage in different parts of the Indian media and presented the various news contexts for reporting China. Most of the coverage on China, he mentioned, was on news portals/televisions with news platforms being the key source of news. While mainstream English news media, particularly television, were more focused on reporting security issues, local language media were less so. He pointed out the differences existing between different local languages such as between Hindi and Bengali, with readers in the former particularly keen on

knowing about Chinese industry's impact on local Indian market and the latter more on China's domestic development.

On the whole, Mr Anshuman Tiwari mentioned that China is covered widely by the Indian media on a variety of issues – security, water, trade, and cyber space – with perceptions varying among the language-media. However, he pointed out that there is an acute perception deficit in the Indian media, with China being regularly portrayed as a security threat. This, he pointed out, is largely due to the influence of the writings by a small group of experts from the domestic think-tanks. He indicated that the more positive issues like trade/commerce, economics, tourism and science and technology are downplayed vis-à-vis security subjects and border disputes. He also drew attention to the insufficient media exchanges between the two countries especially in the cultural area. He suggested that non-security-oriented China research and reporting, particularly on the economy, has to increase and that there should be proactive policies to promote greater interaction and research. With the Indian readers hungry to know more about China, it is important to increase contacts, research and exchanges.

Ms Tang Lu reviewed the relations between India and China in the media. She felt that the relations between the media reflect the relations between the two countries. However, in recent years, they have become more complicated. She felt that while the official relations have been in a stable developmental stage, the media relations have been quite different, with the latter emphasising negative news. This leads to negative public perceptions of China by Indians and vice versa.

Ms Tang Lu identified a few factors that result in the negative media coverage in both countries. Apart from the factors such as business and commercial consideration, and Western media reports, she also mentioned the Pakistan factor in the China-India equation and the competition between these two countries for Asian dominance. She noted that sections of the Chinese media, especially the market-oriented media and online media, specifically seek to promote national pride by showing that China is superior to India or by focusing on issues which foster nationalism such as perceptions about reported tensions along the disputed border. She observed that Chinese reporters generally lack knowledge of Indian history and culture and rely on Western media to report news on India. The Indian media, on the other hand, portray China as a hostile country and still carry the emotional baggage of India's loss to China during the 1962 war.

Ms Tang Lu encouraged greater media interaction between the two countries and highlighted examples of how India and China are publishing or reproducing news from each other's media. This could however lead to hostilities if negative news is exaggerated.

She observed that in China people are unaware that among Indians there are a variety of views. The Chinese may, therefore, consider the view expressed by a particular section of the

Indian media as being representative of the general Indian perception. Likewise, Indians think that since the Chinese Government can control the local media, all the opinions published in the Chinese media are reflective of the Chinese Government's views. However this is not true, especially, of the opinion pieces or blogs. She concluded by saying that unless there is some breakthrough in China-India relations, the negativity in the media on both sides is unlikely to change.

Mr Ananth Krishnan focused on Sino-Indian relations and domestic issues in China. He identified his sources of information for reporting on diplomacy as the Communist Party of China (CPC) International Department, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, some Chinese newspapers, and think-tanks. However, he observed that the information landscape in China is changing fast and there are more than just a few mouthpieces. He discussed the new media and described the hawkish nature of some strategic websites. He showcased two case studies in his presentation. The first was the case of Kang Lingyi's website in 2009, where someone opined that China should break up India into 30 pieces. This was widely covered by the Indian media. The Indian media assume that every view echoes the voice of Beijing's and thus show a lack of nuance in interpretation.

The second case study referred to by Mr Ananth Krishnan was the media 'tit-for-tat' that began in 2009 with the launch of China's English language daily *Global Times*. The *Global Times*' aggressive editorials have played a role in negatively colouring the Indian media perceptions of China. The Indian media's overreliance on China's English newspapers leads to a skewed view on China-related issues. In the Indian media, there are regular incorrect reports on China, such as China setting up bases in Pakistan. Mr Ananth Krishnan emphasised the need for greater self-regulation from the Indian media and noted that there are already instances of newspapers correcting one another. He also bemoaned the lack of access to officials in China, which results in further reliance on the nationalistic media. He suggested that there should be robust public diplomacy response from the two countries and there should be more media-to-media interactions. He proposed exchanges between newspapers and media organisations from both countries as an effective way of increasing interactions.

Summary of Follow-On Discussions:

Quite a few queries during the discussions were centred on the issues of visas and travel. The first question was put to Mr Anshuman Tiwari as to whether he had any problems in obtaining a visa for China. He responded by saying that he did not get a journalistic visa but was granted a regular tourist visa. Mr Ananth Krishnan was asked how easy it was for him to visit Tibet and Xinjiang. He replied that foreign journalists are not allowed to go to the Tibet Autonomous Region and also faced restrictions in reporting out of other Tibetan areas in China, particularly in Sichuan and Gansu provinces. He recalled being detained by the police on a recent reporting trip to Gansu. He clarified that while there are no problems in travelling

to Xinjiang, it is difficult to gain access to officials and news reports have to be prepared by speaking to people on the ground. Professor Richard Rigby commented that reports would be more objective if foreign journalists are allowed into Tibet.

It was also pointed out that bilateral cultural and social interactions between India and China have increased, as can be seen from the presence of large numbers of Indian students in China and also the increasing number of Indian tourists in China. This point was clarified, with the rider that number of visitors, as indicated by the scale of tourist visas, may not reflect the correct purposes of visits and exchanges, because most visitors, including journalists and business professionals, might travel on tourist visas only.

Responding to a question on why the Chinese Government viewed the media scene as a problem, Ms Tang Lu recalled that in 2009, the Indian media resorted to an anti-China propaganda spree. The Chinese media at that time criticised the Indian Government and Indian media, saying that the Indian Government was unable to control its own media. This was an example of the kind of misunderstanding that exists about the media.

Commenting on the role of the Western media in India-China media relations, Mr Ananth Krishnan cited a reason for the Western media having a strong influence. On occasions, the Western news bureaus in China, such as the Wall Street Journal and Dow Jones, have had as many as 45 journalists covering various issues in China, with far more resources at their disposal, compared to the Indian media, which has only four journalists on the ground in China. Therefore, the Western media articles are bound to be more rigorous and have greater depth. However, he felt that the Western media should not be blamed for poor relations between India and China because there are real points of difference which the Indian and other media will be within their rights to report on. Moreover, the Indian media are sensible enough not to accept everything reported by the Western media.

On Mr Ananth Krishnan's views about the hawkish articles on India published by *Global Times*, it was pointed out that, on several occasions, such writings were indeed in response to Indian articles. The Indian media, it was further pointed out, were also required to be more objective in this regard. Mr Ananth Krishnan responded that the Indian media like the *Times of India* do not represent the Indian Government and do not reflect its views. The articles in the independent Indian media need not be given that much attention in this regard. On a query whether innocuous reporting on India-China-Pakistan relations can forge better relations among them, Mr Ananth Krishnan responded that journalists report on what they consider relevant, and, in the case of China-Pakistan relations, there are aspects which genuinely concern India and deserve to be reported.

Session 7: Conclusions, Reflections and Next Steps

Moderator: Dr Amitendu Palit

Panellists: Professor Shen Dingli, Professor Govind Hariharan, Professor Robin Jeffrey, Professor Richard Rigby, Mr P S Suryanarayana

The session began with Dr Amitendu Palit providing a summary of the main points that emerged out of the previous six sessions. These were:

Media in both countries are more preoccupied with reporting on domestic issues than foreign policy issues.

Media in both countries are far more complex than otherwise perceived.

When it comes to reporting on China and India, both the Indian media and Chinese media depend a lot on secondary sources such as wire agencies, foreign media, reports on each other by each other.

A lot of reports are based on opinion pieces including those appearing in new media.

Indian media report a lot more on China than the Chinese media do on India. The Indian media's reporting on China also varies in thematic content across regions and languages.

The presence of overseas correspondents helps in making reports more objective.

Reports coming out in the Western media appear to be influencing perceptions of both Chinese and Indian media about each other.

Social media have become increasingly important in influencing perceptions and are expected to become even more important. Traditional media in both countries should decide how much of importance they should attach to reports in social media particularly the hawkish reflections.

It is unrealistic to expect media on both sides to be entirely fair and objective on all occasions as they have to survive under competitive pressures.

It is important to improve the interface and interactions between media on both sides.

Professor Shen Dingli mentioned that this was the first time he was attending a China-India conference on media and appreciated the constructive effort. He felt that it is important for both the Chinese and Indian journalists to understand how they work in their respective professional eco-system. He also suggested that it is important for journalists from both sides

to be professional and objective, particularly when quoting experts. Pointing out that modern journalism has to survive under the pressures of competition and nationalism, Professor Shen Dingli emphasised the importance of recognising that there are multiple voices in both countries. Great care should be exercised before assuming the opinions expressed on the internet to be official. He called for more exchanges between the media on both sides to make them more responsible and to make Asia a more stable, safe and prosperous place.

Professor Govind Hariharan regretted that, in spite of business and trade having expanded rapidly between India and China, people-to-people interactions are still limited. He suggested internship programmes and student exchanges as the possible means for generating more interface. He also mentioned that some of the positive discussions that took place in the workshop could be put up on YouTube for greater and popular dissemination.

Professor Richard Rigby agreed with the suggestion and said that, while it is not the responsibility of media to improve bilateral relationship at the inter-state level, it is also important for them not to make it any worse. Both Professor Richard Rigby and Professor Robin Jeffrey underscored the importance of preparing handbooks on Chinese and Indian media, which would have relevant and basic information and which could be useful guides for media on both sides. The idea of the handbooks was widely endorsed by the participants. Professor Richard Rigby also suggested that all future issue-based discussions involving China and India should have media representatives from either side.

Highlighting the importance of carrying the ISAS-initiated exercise forward, Mr P S Suryanarayana proposed that suitable themes be chosen to address the past and present trends in China-India relations and also to envision future possibilities. In his view, the past and present trends could now be classified into four phases: From Friendship to a Fight (from the 1950s to 1962); A Long Winter (from 1962 and until Rajiv Gandhi's China visit in 1988); A New Spring (from 1988 to India's nuclear tests of 1998, inclusive of the positive interlude of dialogue between P V Narasimha Rao and Jiang Zemin); and finally Deterrence and Diplomacy (from India's nuclear tests of 1998 to the present and into the future).

In this respect, Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, ISAS Senior Research Fellow who was formerly Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, proposed that such thematic discussions on China-India media mediation should be extended to cover their neighbouring countries as well. He also stressed the imperative of confidence-building measures in the China-India paradigm of relations. Another suggestion from the participants was the creation of a repository of information flow for the benefit of the two countries, especially in regard to non-security issues.

Discussions also focused on the possibility of consolidating the papers presented at the workshop in the form a book. The idea received enthusiastic response and an idea floated was

the possibility of the book being published in both English and Mandarin. Discussion also veered to the true nature of target audiences for whom the book can be suitably presented. Other suggestions included: creating an online community for the group and exploring the possibility of associating government agencies with such exchanges in the future.

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